



ELSAH HISTORY

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An Interview with Bob Lowder, Part II

A year ago we presented a small part of the interviews carried out by Ms. Carol Maxwell in 1984 and 1985. At that time we hoped to be able to offer our readers more of these important reminiscences. The current issue includes Bob's comments on farm animals in the Village and a description of how the stone quarry worked during his childhood. We begin with his stories about horses and mules that belonged to his family. The Lowders lived at the northern end of Mill Street where it joins Cemetery Road, a property now owned by the Mainwaring family. There are also comments on cattle and chickens and their role in the running of the Lowder household.

Q. I've wondered, you know, I've heard of people's gardens and the horses and all they had, and I thought, where did they keep them?

A. Everybody...

F. We used to have mules and everything up there, his uncle.

A. We had 7 to 14 head of horses here, my dad and my uncle did, and they kept 'em on this hill right back here. There's three and three quarter acres of pasture. That belonged to my uncle.

Q. It's woods, now, isn't it?

A. Yeah, it's all grown up now. That used to be you could see—well, the same thing here with the pasture here. This used to be a pasture here behind the house, and that was all bluegrass clear to the top of the hill, and now it's all woods.

Q. Was it woods first, and you cleared it?

A. Well, somebody had cleared it sometime or another. And as far as I can remember, it was just solid bluegrass clear

to the top of the hill. And the same thing with behind the Neuhaus-Clayton Condit House down here, that hill there. That was bluegrass clear to the top of the hill.

Q. So you grazed your livestock up on these hills?

A. Well, we had—let's see, Henry Pellikan lived next door here. He kept his cow in this pasture here. And the Condit's pasture, which was Cockrell lived there at that time, and we kept 3 milk cows in that, and then we had anywhere from 7 to 14 head of horses running in this one over here, and...



Harry and Mrytle Barnal with their twin mules May and Mollie in front of the small Barnal house on Mill Street. This house has been rebuilt in expanded form by Pauline Bradley in the past two years.

Q. Wow, that's a lot of livestock.

A. Wintertime, why they would take a team a piece and take 'em down to the blacksmith's shop and have 'em sharpshod. And of course, when you have to have a team sharpshod, when you've got to keep 'em tied up all the time. You can't let 'em get together on account of they go to playin' or happen to kick one another, why they'd ruin him.

Q. I have never seen a shoe for something...

A. It was cork, and it would come to a pretty sharp point, and it was between three-quarter and an inch long.

Q. The spikes were?

A. The spikes was on the back. And then it had a toe; the toe was sharp, too.

Q. Did the toes have a piece of metal that came down to the stick in the ice?

A. Yeah, and the toe of the shoe, it had a cleat on it, and it was the same length.

Q. Oh, OK, so it was like a squared-off cleat?

A. Yeah, and it was the same length. And everybody that had it that worked horses, they always had one team sharpshod for winter use, because they had to go out in any kind of weather and get feed in out of the fields for their other stocks, and out and....

Q. So they'd keep one team all sharpshod so they could go out and get the feed?

A. Yeah. And then also everybody that had a team of horses in the wintertime, why, they would need 'em when the ponds and everything froze over around, all of farm ponds out here and the Ames pond and maybe the river. A lot of times when they'd freeze over, well, then they'd cut ice, and they had to have those sharpshod horses to be able to pull that ice back into the ice houses here in town.

Q. I forgot to ask you, is a team two horses?

A. Two.

Q. Just two, okay. Well, you said you'd had 7 to 14 horses, and I thought, well, maybe that was because the teams were 4 horses.

A. Well, you use a team. A team is 2 horses or sometimes a team is 3-horse, 3-horse team or 3-horse hitch, whatever you want to call it.

Q. How do you harness 3 horses? Three abreast.

A. Yeah. And then you'd have what you'd call a 3-horse evenner. And that's a — an evenner comes across like this, and you've got a double tree that goes over on the one side where like a team is hooked up, and then the third horse is hooked over here on a single tree by itself. And there's a trick to it that where your clevis goes to where your load is going to be hooked into this here longtree here is, you have to have it — I forget the measurements, but anyway, it's over here closer to the double tree than it is to the singletree, see. It's off center. It looked like it would be uneven, but it's not when you hook 3 horses together like that.

Q. So could you change that and just take the one single-tree off and use it with 2 horses, or could you...?

A. No, what you would do, you would take your double tree off over here, and then you would do away with this big one, with this one on it, and just hook the double tree over here and use just 2 horses on it.

Q. So you could convert it back and forth?

A. Yeah.

Q. Was that for plowing or harvesting or something, that you'd use 3 horses?

A. Yeah, well, yeah, like a lot of times you would use maybe 3 horses to pull a harrow with when you was harrowing the ground down after you'd plowed it. And sometimes you'd use 4 horses on it. But a lot of 'em just used 3, and then they also, they had a disk that they pulled, and they used 3 horses on the disk.

Q. When you were working the ground, you plowed it and you harrowed it and you disked it, but what order did you do all that stuff in?

A. You'd plow and disk and harrow.

Q. So you'd do it 1-2-3?

A. And sometimes you'd drag it, too, and then you'd come along and plant it.

Q. And then did you turn it over when you were all done in the winter, or did you leave it in wheat?

A. No, most of the time, back in those days, they never worried about their fall plowing like they do now, you know, when they got the big machinery, they did all of their spring plowin'.

Q. So you really just worked the ground once a year?

A. Yeah.

Q. Did you have much trouble with prairie grass and that sort of thing when you were working the ground?

A. Well, we didn't have all of the weedkiller stuff that they have nowadays. You just went ahead and you planted your corn and you went in and cultivated it as long as you could cultivate it, and after it got too big to cultivate, why, you let the weeds take over.

Q. Did you cultivate by hand?

A. No, you had a—two horses pulled a cultivator, and you straddled the row and you had a cultivator shovel, one down on each side of the row, and . . .

Q. Did the horse walk between the rows then?

A. Yeah, your team of horses straddled a row, and your cultivator straddled that row.

Q. So they must have been pretty well behaved horses, or you'd cut across your row.

A. Yeah. If they didn't, why, they got the blacksnake whip! Either that or my dad always had on his team of horses, he had one line that was six foot longer than the other one, and he didn't need a whip, he'd just catch that line up and he could get that horse or mule right between the ears with it, get his attention that way!

Q. Yeah, I was going to say, he paid attention to it! Did he train his own horses?

A. Yeah, we broke our own horses. And we had horses and mules, and we worked either one of 'em.

Q. Did you prefer one over the other?

A. I? I like to work mules. I worked a team of twin mules we had here. We raised the twin mules from colts. They were born right over—one of 'em was

born right behind the apartment over here at the Mainwaring's, and then 15 minutes later, we'd got her and the colt over to the barn which stood right up here on the corner by the bridge. And 15 minutes from the time the first one was born, why, the second one was born in the stable up there. We didn't even know she was going to have twins, and they were born 15 minutes apart, and one weighed about 150 pounds more than the other one all of their life. That's the way they was.

Q. Well, that's a lot at birth.

A. And they were coal black, had a bay nose. And 2 feet had a little bay streak around above her hoof, and that was all the marking, outside of a white spot right on her forehead.

Q. On both of them?

A. And both of 'em was marked exactly the same. And my dad broke them, and then after he broke 'em, why, he wouldn't work them because they was too fast for him. And so they turned 'em over to me because I was the youngest one around.

F. What do you mean "too fast"?

A. Too fast, go down the road too fast or cultivate or plow or anything like that.

F. Oh, I see.

A. It was too fast. To cultivate corn you had to be fairly careful with that, set your fenders close to the ground and keep 'em from covering your corn up!



Bob Lowder's uncle Harry Barnal with the twin Mules, May and Mollie, shortly after they were born.

- Q. Well, I would think it would be tricky. How would you go about breaking a mule or a horse? What would you do?
- A. Well, all we did was we got the harness on 'em, got 'em hitched together and then fight 'em for about an hour, and to get them to straddle a tongue so we could get them hooked up, and then hop in a wagon and get ready for a ride because they'd run off with you the first time.
- F. Didn't one horse get loose here? Where did they find it? Wasn't it one of the riding horses?
- A. Well, that was old Buck, grandma's ridin' horse.
- F. He got lost one day. And where did they find him?
- A. Up at the picnic grounds. Ned Bradley lived there.
- F. Yeah, he was a great big horse. They finally put him up to Pere Marquette stables.
- A. The reason he run off was the old Pal, that was the other horse, run him off. They got in a fight, running him, and he took off. I guess he got lost, and he was gone 3 days. And finally Ned Bradley happened to spot him standing out under the picnic pavilion up there at the picnic grounds when he lived up there. And we went up there, just walked right up to him and got him!
- Q. He was probably feeling a little lost.
- A. Yeah, he was a pretty tame horse anyway.
- F. He was a big horse, my. I was on him once, and I got on him once, and I said, "I don't want on that thing any more." He looked like he was . . .
- A. He was about 17 hands high.
- Q. Good grief! What kind of horse was he?
- A. Quarter horse, he was a big one.
- Q. That's a big quarter horse.
- A. Yeah, he was big.
- Q. What kind of horses did most people have?
- A. I don't know. Most of the horses we had here were just, I don't know, just average run of horse.
- Q. So they weren't keeping registered horses?
- A. No, no, all they was after was a good work horse. I've seen my uncle, be with him, and he'd run onto somebody, and they'd get to talking horses. And you didn't know what you was going to come home behind whenever they got to talking, because they'd trade right in the middle of the road.
- Q. Did you ever have trouble when you were driving your team in?
- A. No.
- Q. They'd just follow along pretty good?
- A. Yeah, I never had any trouble with the horses, because I was raised with 'em all my life. I rode 'em ever since I was big enough to crawl up on one! We used to go out and sneak 'em out of the pasture, get in trouble for stealin' horses out when they was supposed to be restin'. And Chub Cresswell. We was always stealin' a horse. And they finally locked the bridles up on us so we couldn't get a bridle. So then someplace along the line, we'd saw a picture where the Indians rode 'em with just a rope in their mouth. So it worked pretty good; we tried it!
- Q. Did it work?
- A. Yeah, that's what I was doin' the day I got throwed, when I got my leg busted up.
- Q. Oh no, what happened?
- A. Well, I was trying to catch Chub Cresswell. He had the big old brown mare we had, and I was ridin' this here little grey. She was kind of flighty anyway, and all I had was rope in her mouth. And I was down there, right on that little grade comin' up beside Delby Darr's house [Corner Nest] there. I was fannin' her along pretty good, and I must have flipped her in the flank or sumpin' 'cause she dumped me right there! Felt like I went about 40 feet in the air. And when I come down, I come around right underneath her, and she just kicked the livin' daylight out of me. And I got up and I hobbled around. Man, I couldn't hardly go, but I knew better than to come home and tell Dad what happened. I come home, and they wanted to know what happened to me. And I said "Oh, Don Cresswell and we were jumpin' off the old cellar roof down there, and I bumped my leg." And so that went on pretty good, 'cause we was always doin' sumpin'. Went on about three or four days. And he went down to pick up the mail one day, and Alice Mandorca was the postmaster then, and she wanted to know how I was doin', and he said,

"What do you mean?" She said, "Well, that horse kicked him the other day when it threwed him." So I got tore up again when he got a hold of me!

Q. How'd you get the horse home?

A. Oh, she didn't run very far, and Chub Cresswell rode up aside of her on the other horse and caught her. And I hobbled up to her and put the rope back in her mouth and crawled on and we come on home! We didn't fool around back—you get throwed or get hurt or something like that, why, you didn't pay any attention to it. You just kept on the go with it. Now they got to go to the hospital and everything else!

Q. Did you have a cast on your leg?

A. No.

Q. You never put a cast on it?

A. That's why my right leg is crooked!

Q. She left her mark on you.

A. That was a big old horse. She's the one that used to—I'd go in to feed her. And Darr barn that we had, you always walked right into the stall with the horses. We didn't have no hallway in front. And we'd take in her grain, and every time I'd take the grain in, she'd stand there, and she'd be watching me out of the corner of her eye. And when I'd get up just about to the center of her, why, then she'd start crowdin' me and try to pinch me into the partition. And one day I got tired of it, and so I come out of the feed room, had a pan full of feed. I knew she was goin' to do it, and there was an old pitchfork handle there that'd been broke off, had a sharp point on it where it'd split off. I just put that down to the side of me, and I walked in there with a pan of food. And here she come, boy. She was goin' to crowd meat that wall. And I just stuck the pitchfork handle up agin' the partition, and she come into that sharp point. She like tore the other side of the barn out.

Q. Did she ever crowd you after that?

A. No, not for a while!

Q. What other kinds of things did you do when you were a kid? You had to feed the horses, and you had to smoke the ham, and you had to work on the garden.

A. Milk the cow. Pull weeds for the hogs. They had to have their greenery. That's the way we cleaned our garden. That's parsley and that, had to pull a bushel basket full of that for each pen that we had.

Q. Every day?

A. Every day.

Q. That's quite a bit. Did you pull that out of the garden?

A. Yeah. It growed pretty heavy in the garden, and that was one way of gettin' the weeds out of the garden. And of course, there was another weed that grows in there; they call them a hogweed because the hogs'd just go nuts over it. It's a great big weed. We'd pull that. And then a lot of times when the pastures would get short, why, of course, there wasn't no automobile traffic around here then, and we'd let our milk cows out along the road, and take 'em up towards the Cemetery Road and that, and let 'em eat along the road 'cause nobody mowed it along there, and there was always nice grass along there. We'd have to take 'em up there and watch 'em for an hour or two.

Q. What would you do while you watched 'em?

A. Well, you couldn't leave 'em too far, 'cause if they caught you when you wasn't watchin' 'em, whew, they'd take off on you. So they were pretty shrewd, too. So we'd just fiddle around along the road!

Q. So they'd walk along and graze, and you'd just walk with them?

A. Yeah, they wouldn't go too far, I mean, now. It wouldn't take 'em too long. And then when they started to millin' around too much, why, then we'd take 'em back because they were gettin' full, and they weren't goin' to do nothing but just roam then. So we'd bring 'em back home and put 'em in the yard.

Q. Did you go out with somebody when you did that? Just you and the cows, or was there anybody...?

A. Well, a lot of times it was just me and the cows. And then a lot of times, why, one of my brothers would be along, maybe both of 'em. Or maybe some of the other guys that lived downtown like Herb Fessler, Billy Crandell, and all of them. The old guys that used to live here, well, they might be up; they'd be with me.

Q. They'd have their cattle with them, too?

A. No, they didn't have cattle. None of them had a cow down there.

Q. What'd you do with the milk? Did you sell it to people like them?

A. No, well, most of the milk we used. We made our own butter. And we had two or three people who'd come and get milk, and that was about all the milk we could supply with two cows.

Q. Don't they produce about 13 pounds a day or something like that?

A. Well, I don't know. All we did was we'd just measure it by the gallon, you know. About a 12-quart bucket full about what you'd get.

Q. A day?

A. At a milkin'.

Q. Oh, so twice a day?

A. Yeah.

Q. That's quite a bit.

A. Yeah, we had one old cow. My dad thought the world of that old cow, and I hated her. Every time I'd sit down and milk her, she'd kick the bucket out of my hand or kick me off the stool or sumpin'. She was a mean old son-of-a-gun. Dad'd go in and sit down and never have a bit of trouble with her. Just let me walk in there and, man, she'd tear me up. Big old white cow and had big long horns, and, man, she could kick!

Q. She liked your dad, though?

A. Well, she had a reason to like him, 'cause he'd grab that milking stool up and work her over with it!

Q. Guess she respected him, then?

A. Yeah, he didn't fool with 'em. He was the same way with a horse. He loved them horses, but they'd better do what he wanted 'em to.

Q. He'd get after 'em.

A. Yeah, they'd remember him, too.

Q. Did many people have animals then, around here?

A. Well, quite a few people had horses, buggy horses.

Q. Did they keep 'em up in a pasture behind their house or something?

A. Most of 'em now just kept 'em in the little lot right at the house, and they dry fed. Like the horses. We had regular old work horses, and most of them had nice buggy horses, you know, all fancy little horses, and they weren't big enough to do any work, pull a buggy.

Q. Oh, you were telling me about that man with the beautiful sorrel.

A. That was Bill Harris, lived in the rock house [Alexander] right at the stop sign at the foot of the hill there. Used to be a barn stand there where they've got the garage now. They got two garages, I guess, built side by side there now where there used to be a barn sittin'. He kept his buggy in one side and his horses in the other side of it.

Q. Were his horses special, or did everybody have beautiful buggy horses?

A. No, they just — back then they were like they are now-a-days a car, you know. One tried to outdo the other one.

Q. Did you have to keep the chickens in a hen house?

A. Just at night. Daytime they run all over the place. And the way you kept the hawks out of 'em, you had a little flock of guineas along with 'em.

Q. What would the guineas do?

A. Well, I don't know how they do it, but they can spot a hawk about as quick as that hawk could spot that flock of chickens. And they'd start hollerin'. And they can holler! And them old chickens would take off.

Q. Where'd you get the guineas? Did everybody have guineas?

A. A lot of people did, you know, back then. I always liked the old speckled guinea, blue and white spots on him. That's the one I liked. And a lot of people'd have the pure white guinea. I never did care for them. They were pure white. And young guinea is real good eatin'.

Q. Oh, so you eat 'em too?

A. Oh yeah, the young guinea is real good eatin'.

Q. What are they like?

A. Well, they're between the chicken and game bird, kind of more like a wild bird then they are a tame, like chicken. And they're good, but you want to get like not over a year old, for good frying. After they get older than that, why, then you've got to go to the pot and boil 'em a while!

Q. What did you do with the chickens? Do you use them for meat or for eggs, or both?

A. Used 'em for both. And then a lot of times if we had more than we wanted, we had a bunch of chickens that —every year we'd raise so many chickens, they'd either buy 'em or raise them from settin' hens. And then Dad would pick out the pullets that he wanted to keep for his next year's land chickens. And then he'd always had chickens with bands on their legs, he knew just how old they was. Well then, the older ones, maybe he wanted to keep a couple, two or three of 'em, for stewin' chickens. And then the rest of them, why, put in a coop some time, take 'em to town and sell 'em. And there were, you know, places in town back then that you could just, either in Alton or Jerseyville, either one, you could take 'em in and sell them, sell your chickens. Or you could sell anything from one, two, three, or half a dozen at one time. And eggs....

Q. They were like cash, then?

A. Yeah, you'd take 'em in and sell them to the chicken place and then turn around and stop at the store and spend it on other groceries! We used to take and skim the milk. Now, like we have extra milk, why, Mom would skim that, and we had what you call a cream bucket, kept that right in the spring where it'd stay cold. And then every Saturday, they'd take that in to the creamery up in Jerseyville they had, and sell that. And boy there was good money in that, pure cream. That was good money. Now they can't do that.

Q. How come?

A. Well, it has to be processed through....

Q. Did you drink some, too?

A. Not just the pure cream. Well, once in a while we'd

have it on like raspberries or berries or something like that, or pie. But most of the time we sold it, either that or—of course, you'd use the whole milk. When Mom would make butter, why, we'd use the whole milk then, for that.

Q. Did you put on plays and stuff, socials?

A. Oh yeah, we did quite a bit of that. During the grade school, that was our way of doin'. You know, at that time you didn't have a way of goin' every place like you did now. Not too many people owned cars, so you done everything in the community. Then my dad built a big sleigh, and we always had a team that was sharp shod. In the wintertime we'd get a big snow on, why, they never plowed snow. And he'd get a group together and hook up that sleigh in the evening, and we'd load that old wagon box that was on there. They put side boards on the wagon box and loaded the bottom part about half full of straw. And everybody'd get blankets, and they'd be eight or ten couple on that one sleigh, and we'd go all over. We'd go out through Dow and all of, and come back in and go to somebody's house, and have hot chocolate and popcorn and apples. And that's the way we spent our evenings a lot.

Q. That must have taken all evening, too, to go on a long ride like that?

A. Yeah, we'd go all the way out around Dow and Newbern and come out. Like we'd go out past the cemetery, what they call the Cemetery Road, and go out through that way, and go out through Dow and Newbern. Then we'd go out what they call the Knight Road, and come back into the Salem Road, and then come back in the Elsah Road, and come back into Elsah that way.

Q. That sounds fun.

A. We had a lot of fun!

Q. What age were the people that went?

A. All ages.

Q. So it wasn't just the young people?

A. No, it wasn't just the young people. No, it was everybody.

Q. Did your dad drive?

A. Yeah, oh, he always drove that team.

Q. Did your mom come, too?

A. Sometimes she would come. Yeah, my dad was just like a big kid. He got a kick out of doin' stuff like that.

Q. How many kids were in your family?

A. I had two brothers. There were five of us all in all in the family. My dad and my mother and two brothers and myself. We were all raised right over here in the valley, where Mainwaring's live now.

Q. Were you born there, too?

A. Yeah.

Q. All three of you?

A. Yeah, all three of us were borned right in that house there! We raised a big garden and raised our own meat. And my dad, he teamed. And anybody wanted any hauling done, why, he did it with a team of wagon. There used to be a guy come through here, and he'd buy up timber. Every so many years, he'd come through and he'd buy up timber. Every so many years, he'd come through and he'd buy up a tract of timber. And when he got everything goin', why, then he'd come down and talk to my dad. And my dad'd haul all of the logs out of the timber for him. And most all of it was loaded onto flat cars on the old railroad down here, and it was shipped out by train.

Q. So your dad carried it from where it stood to the depot?

A. Yes, he drug it out of the timber and then hauled it down and loaded it onto the cars. And he did that all, and he had an old team o' mules he did that with.

Q. That's hard work.

A. Yeah, there was a lot of hard work to it.

Q. Did you ever work at that with him?

A. No, not too much. I was too small. And my dad was one of these, he didn't want nobody in his way when he was handlin' those logs. He had this old team of mules broke to where he could almost talk to 'em, and just like they understood everything that he said to 'em. Yeah, I saw him load — this guy had come through, and he'd buy a tract of walnut logs by the standing walnut trees and cut 'em. And then my dad would haul them down to the railroad, and he'd cut a couple white oak poles to make skids with, and then he'd set him up a snatch block, unload those logs onto the ground, and then put a rollin' hitch on them, and have those mules onto that. He'd just hang the reins on the manes, and he'd stand back there and have a car hook to guide this log up to the skids. And he'd just stand there and talk to them mules, and they'd pull it right up on there. The minute that log hit the flat car on top, why, they would stop. Soon as the slack come in the rope, why, they'd just stop.

Q. Pretty smart animals.

A. Yeah, he had 'em pretty well trained.

In the 1920's the Western Whiting and Manufacturing Company was operating a quarry next to the Elsah waterfront. A neighbor of the Lowders worked in the quarry. Bob often visited the site to bring lunch to the workers. It is difficult for the visitor today to imagine the activity that must have characterized the Whiting Mill. The product was a powder that was used for putty ink, and for paint.

Q. Did they have a quarry down there?

A. Yeah, right there by the waterworks where you go through, where all of those caves are at, there by the waterworks. When they first built that, see, we drove right through the quarry, when they first started using what they called the McAdams Highway. That's from Clifton Terrace to the waterworks there; that's the McAdams Highway.

Q. Did they make those caves? Did people dig out those caves?

A. Yeah, they did that. See, the stone is runnin' out when you start seein' those caves like that in a quarry. And the stone is runnin' out. They're havin' to move. When they bring a ledge down they're havin' to move too much material that's no good to get the little bit of good rock. So what they'll do, they'll get a vein, and then they'll just quarry into it and tunnel into it.

Q. Is that what they did up — they didn't make caves up here, though?

A. They got one, just a little one. It's just a hole back in there. And what that was done for, that hole was in there, was, when they closed this quarry down here they had an order that they had to fill. And 'stead of goin' up and blatin' the ledge, you can look up there on the bluff, and you can see where the last ledge was that they was workin' on, and they was bringin' that down. But anyway, instead of goin' up there and workin' that ledge, they made this tunnel in down there to get that rock that they wanted for this here company.

Q. Were they running out of rock? They weren't running out of rock. They just...?

A. Well, this quarry here, if you look at it — and what they were having to handle an awful lot of that flint. You know, they call it flint, but that's junk rock, you know. And they was gettin' to where they had to handle — you can see an awful lot of it there in the face of it, too, if you look up at it.

Q. And that's no good?

A. No.

Q. What was the rock that they were quarrying?

A. Well, this here was paint and putty. They had a putty mill down here, too. Henry Pellikan lived next door here. He was farmin' in the putty mill down there. And when I was a kid runnin' around here, every day at eleven o'clock I would come over to here to the house, and his wife would have his lunch bucket fixed. And it was one of the old-time lunch buckets where they put the coffee in the bottom and the sandwiches on top, and the coffee was supposed to kinda help keep the sandwiches warm, you know. And so I would take his lunch bucket down, and he would set it up on top of one of the kilns in there to keep his coffee hot.

Q. Was it metal, the lunchbox?

A. Yeah, it was a metal lunchbox, and it was kind of an oval-shaped box. And it came apart; it was like a tray in the top part where the sandwiches went, and then underneath of it was just a bucket where the coffee went in it loose. And then of course, the tray then had a lid that fit on it tight. And I'd go down there, and then I'd sit around and watch him. And you'd almost have to see the picture of it to know

what I'm talkin' about. But anyway the putty mill set above the old quarry, and there was I can't remember whether it was three or four kilns here. And then there was a big vat, two big vats set up behind these kilns. And this is where this stone was at, and then they'd mix water in it, and then they cooked that to a certain extent to make putty. And these guys would—like their stoker coal was on this side here, and then they had this big opening here, and they'd walk over. And they had to keep so much distance between the fire and this here, the stoke pile of coal, 'cause the heat would catch it on fire. And it was Henry Pellikan and a guy by the name of Harry Modlin were the firemen that I knew. And they wore these big heavy quarry shoes; they were big heavy shoes. And then they wore, it looked like a sandal, wooden-soled sandal with a real thick sole on it. And that had straps on it, so they first step into it so it'd fit right over the top of their regular shoes. And they had to have that, because that floor would get so hot in there that it would set those wooden soles on fire and get 'em to smoulderin'. And they had a barrel. It was a big old wooden barrel, sit right next to the door, and it was cut 'til it was about, I don't know, it was 14 or 16 inches deep, and that was full of water. And every once in a while you'd see 'em walk over there and stick their shoe down in there and put the fire out in that there. And that's how hot it was in that place there.

Q. Boy, that must have been miserable. Did they do it in the summer, too?

A. Yeah, year round. They had that, and then I used to go and watch. . . [break]. And they had these little dump cars that they filled up, loaded down in the quarry. And then when they were ready, why, they first hook a rope with a hook into the front of the car and give him a high sign that it was ready to come up. And he'd sit there and pull it up. And it had a bunk board. And he'd pull it up and he'd watch it, and when he got it up so high coming up over the grade into where it'd come on the level, then he'd speed it up just enough to make it bump real good. And well, when it bumped, why, it would gravity dump, and dump the rock over into the crusher.

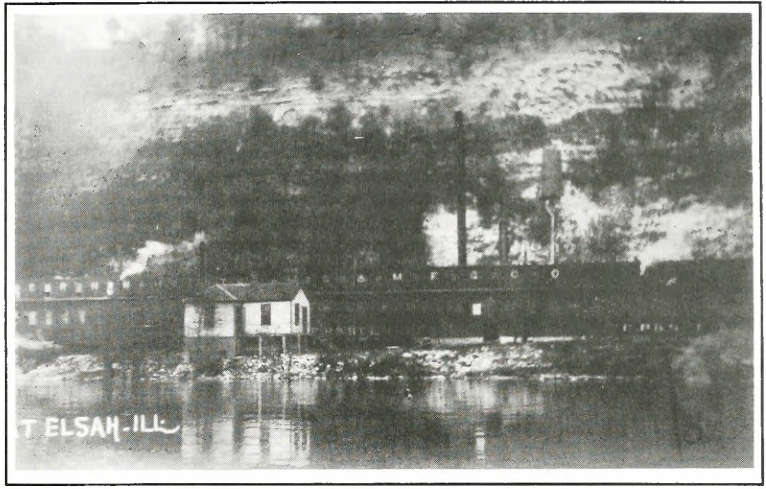
Q. It took a bit of skill to do that just right.

A. Yeah, it took practice to learn how to do it, you know, to get it to where you dumped to the way you wanted it to dump! Sometimes they'd turn over on the wrong side.



Quarry workers at the Whiting Mill. No date.
Courtesy of John Barnal.

Historic Elsah Foundation will host a reception in the Old Village Hall following the joint hymn sing on Sunday, December 16, 1990. The sing will begin at 2 pm in the United Methodist Church of Elsah, and halfway through the program the congregation will move across Selma Square to First Church of Christ Scientist.



The Western Whiting and Manufacturing
Company from the river, ca. 1920
Courtesy of John Barnal.



View from Mount Vernon Bluff, ca. 1910, looking toward the Whiting Mill.
In the foreground is DOD fellows hall and the railroad trestle.
Courtesy of Howard Brock Elder

Q. Well, how did they mine the rock? How did they get the rock out?

A. Hand-drilled and blasted it with dynamite. And that was another thing I used to do when I was a little guy. Of course, the quarry—well, I was fairly small yet, or young, when the quarry closed down, but I used to ride with my dad on the old wagon, and he would haul 8 or 10 boxes of dynamite from down at their storage room down on the riverfront and haul it all the way up to goin' up the picnic grounds where Al Mack lives. Well, when you get right in front of his house, if you look over at the cliff, you can still see the imprint of an old road goin' around the bluff, and that'll take you right around and take you right up on top of the quarry there. And that's the way we used to drive a wagon up there. And up on top of the hill, or the bluff there, was a metal box buried in the ground. It was big enough to hold 10 boxes of dynamite, and we'd haul it up there, and my dad put the dynamite in there, 50-pound boxes of dynamite, and it was big enough for 10 boxes of it.

Q. So you'd haul 500 pounds of dynamite up that hill?

A. Yeah, they're 50 pounds and we'd take 10 boxes at a time up there in the wagon.

Q. Did that worry you?

A. Didn't think nothin' about it! Put it in there, and then whoever was the quarry foreman, why, he was always there, and he'd put a padlock on it, you know, so it'd keep anybody out of it.

Q. Did you use the horse and wagon?

A. Yeah, we took it up there with horses, a team and wagon.